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CONQUERED LANDS

To the victors, the spoils. A hundred years ago, after the conclusion of the First World War, the British Empire and its French ally broke up the old Ottoman-dominated Arab world and created new countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia), principalities and outposts (the Gulf States, southern Yemen) and puppet states (Egypt, Iran), as well as laying the foundations on which Israel would be built, after the Second World War.

To the victors, the spoils. A hundred or so years later, after the collapse of the Communist world, the triumphant United States moved rapidly to balkanize the Arab world and remove all real and imagined threats to its hegemony. A tally of the 21st-century wars that have wrecked the Middle East provides a horrific balance sheet, by any standard. How is the situation they created viewed by the imperial strategists in Washington? 'Freedom' and 'democracy' are even more remote than they were under the authoritarian-nationalist Arab dictatorships. Even the most cynical occupants of the White House and the Pentagon find it difficult to justify in public the mess they have created.

Over the past year alone, the occupied Palestinian segment of the Arab world has been subjected to the most savage assault by the West, acting through its ever-loyal relay, Israel. The medieval Crusades were brutal, but the lack of technical superiority in weapons on either side gave the Arabs, fighting on their own lands, an advantage. This time Israel and its Western allies have been starving and killing Palestinians. Images of infant bodies being devoured by dogs wandering through deserted streets are a chilling symbol of the full-spectrum nature of this destruction. The British Prime Minister now wants to convince Trump to change the definition of genocide, to avoid future legal embarrassment. Western civilization/barbarism at play. Curiously enough, Trump, judging by his own remarks, may be less keen on killing than the leader of the British Labour Party.

On the face of it, American hegemony in the region is virtually complete. The US embarked on a global policy of divide, occupy, buy and rule. What started in earnest with the Yugoslav civil war has now become a regular feature of US strategy supported by Britain and most of the EU. The gains made by the West in the world's richest energy zone since the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945 have been breathtaking. A brief survey of the region can help to highlight what has been lost and signal the direction in which it is heading.

Saudi Arabia

The first foreign call made by Trump after his 2025 inauguration was to the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). Few were surprised. True, MBS had ordered the execution and dismemberment of a critic, Jamal Khashoggi, who backed another faction in the royal family and wrote regularly for the US press, criticizing MBS for ultra-liberalism and involvement in the Yemen war. Khashoggi's family had been lampooned in *Cities of Salt*, the

celebrated tetralogy by the exiled Saudi novelist, Abdurrahman Munif.[1] Khashoggi's uncle was the personal doctor of the founding monarch, Ibn Saud, and became a rich and influential businessman. This proximity to Saudi and Jordanian royals led Jamal to imagine that he was untouchable, an error of judgement that cost him his life. He traipsed along happily to the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul to collect an official document. Captured by an MBS assassination team, or *firqat el-nemr* ('leopard squad'), he was shot dead and dismembered, his body parts packed neatly in separate parcels. The Turkish secret police filmed the whole business, since the Consulate was naturally under surveillance. They prevented Khashoggi's remains from leaving the country and Erdoğan exposed the Leopard Prince to global scrutiny. American colleagues professed themselves shocked and Khashoggi was granted a *Time* cover and matching obituary; but MBS was secure. The fuss soon died down. With the Israelis killing over two hundred Palestinian journalists in Gaza, a solitary Saudi, despite the victim's high-society contacts in Riyadh and Washington, seems a bagatelle.

Saudi cynics supporting MBS could point out that the modernization of Saudi Arabia has always required the elimination of dissenters. When the British created the Kingdom after the First World War, its structures were masterminded by St John Philby of British intelligence. Fluent in Arabic and Koranic interpretations, he was on a search mission for reliable allies against the Ottoman Empire. He picked the most fanatical Islamic sect available, the Wahhabis, uniting it with an easily controllable local tribe under a dim-witted leadership, rebuffed and isolated more capable non-Wahhabis on the Peninsula, and turned the combination against the Ottoman Empire. The Wahhabis regarded mainstream Islam—Sunni and Shia—as the enemy. Key personnel were put on the imperial British payroll. It was a master-stroke; the late offspring produced by this marriage—al-Qaeda remnants and ISIS—carry on the same tradition today.

During the Second World War, Britain handed the Kingdom to the United States. The ceremony took place on St Valentine's Day in 1945. The location was the USS *Quincy*, moored in the Suez Canal. President Roosevelt and the King, Ibn Saud, signed a concordat that would guarantee perpetual single-family rule. FDR retained the monarchy as a safeguard against perceived radical nationalist and communist threats.[2] These were not discussed. Roosevelt instead opened the conversation on the *Quincy* by asking the King his views on the Jewish refugees in Europe. What to do? The memorandum of the conversation informs us:

> The President asked His Majesty for his advice regarding the problem of Jewish refugees driven from their homes in Europe. His Majesty replied that in his opinion the Jews should return to live in the lands from which they were driven. The Jews whose homes were completely destroyed and who have no chance of livelihood in their homelands should be given living space in the Axis countries which oppressed them. The President remarked that Poland might be considered a case in point. The Germans appear to have killed three million Polish Jews, by which count there should be space in Poland for the resettlement of many homeless Jews . . .[3]

Ibn Saud wanted assurances that Arab lands would not be taken by the Jews: 'His Majesty stated that the hope of the Arabs is based upon the word of honour of the Allies and upon the well-known love of justice of the United States, and upon the expectation that the United States will support them.'

The sons of Ibn Saud ruled the state with an iron fist. In the 1950s, the King and his Princes began trying to increase their share of revenue from Saudi oil production, managed by US-controlled Aramco which made sure that strikes were savagely crushed, workers deported to their country of origin and no Saudi employees were permitted entry to the company cinema. Jim Crow laws prevailed. Hardly surprising, given that a large chunk of white US employees

belonged to the Ku Klux Klan. The anti-colonial wave that swept through the Arab world did not leave the Kingdom unaffected. In 1956, the Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser had defied Britain and France, nationalized the Suez Canal and declared: 'Let the imperialists choke on their rage.' Joined by eight-year-old Israel, the imperial powers invaded Egypt. In *America's Kingdom*, Robert Vitalis provides a unique account of this period, destroying many mythologies in the process.[4] The two Saudi figures that come off best are the former Oil Minister, Abdullah Tariki, and the veteran Saudi diplomat, Ibn Muammar. Tariki, a shrewd, skilful, incorruptible technocrat, argued for the state takeover of Saudi oil in the late 1950s, and was demonized by Aramco. Both men staunchly defended Saudi interests against the US oil giant from the start.

Tariki helped split the royal family, publicly exposing the corruption of the then Crown Prince Faisal. In 1961 Tariki and the dissident Prince Talal, a supporter of Arab nationalism, accused Faisal of demanding and obtaining a permanent commission from the Japanese-owned Arabian Oil Company (AOC). The story went public in a Beirut newspaper. An enraged Faisal issued a denial and demanded proof. It was provided. Faisal was shamed. Tariki was sacked and fled into exile. Vitalis informs us that an Aramco spy who met him during his time in Cairo reported back to his superiors:

> I asked him how he would envisage a change in regime. He said that it would be very simple. A small army detachment can do the job by killing the king and Faisal. The rest of the royal family will run for cover like scared rabbits. Then the revolutionaries will call Nasser for help.[5]

This option no longer applies, but continuing chaos in the region could unsettle the Kingdom as happened after 9/11 (hits orchestrated by Osama bin Laden and carried out mainly by Saudi citizens).

King Faisal was assassinated in 1975 by a nephew, also named Faisal, who had studied at Berkeley and the University of Colorado Boulder in the late sixties. But he had laid the foundation of present-day Saudi Arabia, with its reliance on Wahhabism for social control. Though his brother and father before him had sought to institutionalize Wahhabi beliefs, they were more relaxed about it. After the first Gulf War in 1990, the US military arrived; American bases in Saudi Arabia and Qatar were used to launch the war against Iraq. Foreign armies have historically provided one sort of protection; Wahhabi theology another.

For almost a century now the Wahhabi Kingdom has served the needs of the West. MBS is the grandson of its founder. His father, Salman (b. 1935) is not long for this world and, short of a civil war, little can prevent MBS from becoming King. Even in the unlikely case of domestic opposition, he is strongly backed by the US and Israel, as are Jordan and the UAE states (a Qatari friend once joked: 'We are the United Arab Emirate States of America'). MBS was preparing to seal a compact with his rival for US affections in the region, but Israel let him down by reacting to Hamas's October 7 attack with a full-blown genocidal response, isolating itself from a majority of the non-Western world. The Saudis did nothing. Their tiny rival Qatar outshone them yet again: the images and reporting on Al Jazeera provided a sharp contrast to the fake news on Western networks. Had it not been for Gaza, there is no doubt that MBS and Netanyahu would have done a deal already. As they will.

Egypt

Since the 1970s, Egypt has been the biggest success story for the US in the Middle East. Conversations in Cairene cafes are often punctuated by dates rather than years. The day King Farouk was toppled by a radical officer's rebellion. The day Nasser nationalized

the Suez Canal. The last day of the Six Day War, which marked the virtual end of Arab nationalism. Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor, took power in 1970, fought against Israel in 1973, then made 'peace' with Israel at Camp David in 1978. Three years later, he was shot dead by soldier assassins during a military parade marking the anniversary of the Yom Kippur War. His successor, Vice-President Hosni Mubarak, barely escaped with his life.[6] Mubarak deepened relations with Israel, banned the use of live ammunition at ceremonial parades and settled down to enjoy the corrupt fruits of a brutal dictatorship. His name came to stand for torture, amorality, cynicism, duplicity, corruption, greed and opportunism—and, most importantly, blind loyalty to the US and Israel. The High Command of the Egyptian Army did not go down this route involuntarily. They agreed to sell out. In 2024 the Army received $1.3 billion.

In 2011, the mass movement known as the Arab Spring erupted in Tunisia, toppled the dictator and rapidly spread to Egypt. With its public headquarters in Tahrir Square, the struggle to get rid of Mubarak turned out to be hugely popular. Once this became obvious, the Muslim Brotherhood joined the fight. The spectacle in the Square was livestreamed on Al Jazeera. There was one demand: 'Democracy!' The Egyptian Army stationed its tanks in the square and was greeted by the students as the saviour of democracy. 'The Army and the people are one hand' became a popular chant, but this was an expression of hope rather than a fact.

Mubarak rang his friends in the US and Israel for help. The Clintons tried to save him, but it was too late. The Army realized that in order to preserve its own rule, Mubarak had to go. The military leaders of the SCAF who took charge had no illusions in democracy whatsoever. They set about dividing the masses, targeting women in particular. For its part, the movement did not occupy the state TV building situated just behind the Square to broadcast their demands and let the voices of the people be heard day and night. Political

consciousness grew by leaps and bounds but the 'revolution' was ultra-cautious. Liberty was foregrounded, but Fraternity (Arab unity) and Equality (social justice) remained in the shade. The US and Israel had backed Mubarak's dictatorship, but there was very little visible opposition to them—no symbolic burning of the Stars and Stripes, no sighting of a Palestinian flag, no demand for elections to a constituent assembly to prepare a new constitution. The Left forces were tiny. Liberals dominated the spectacle before the Brotherhood decided to join, led by Mohammed Morsi. The latter then became the only seriously organized political force. Their brightest leaders, with some idea of political strategy and tactics, had been expelled, leaving an extremely mediocre layer in command.

As I wrote at the time, while the Arab upheavals did resemble Europe in 1848, not every aspect of life was called into question:

> Social, political and religious rights are becoming the subject of fierce controversy in Tunisia, but not elsewhere yet. No new political parties have emerged, an indication that the electoral battles to come will be contests between Arab liberalism and conservatism in the shape of the Muslim Brotherhood, modelling itself on Islamists in power in Turkey and Indonesia, and ensconced in the embrace of the US.[7]

American hegemony in the region had been slightly dented but no more than that; the scratch was easily repaired. The post-despot regimes remained weak. Unlike in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, new constitutions enshrining social and democratic needs never emerged. The military in Egypt and Tunisia ensured nothing rash happened. The Muslim Brotherhood won the elections and Morsi became President, but was useless on every front. The people were offered very little and the Brotherhood became unpopular. The Army took charge and General Sisi, a former intelligence chief, organized a quick election, winning liberal backing.

Sisi is still in power (now more unpopular than Mubarak), doing as he is bid by Washington and Jerusalem. The cult created for him was grotesque, including bras and men's underwear with his image on the front. Liberal euphoria didn't last long. He is now loathed by large sections of the population. This makes him nervous about taking in a million Gazans, in order to empty the Strip on US-Israeli orders and hand it over to global real estate. Were he to do so, he might need to seek asylum elsewhere. And while Arab people have been cautious since 2011, their quiescence should not be taken for granted.

The Arab Spring varied from country to country, but nowhere did it challenge the system. It was comforting to think of the upsurges as revolutions, but that stage was never reached. Mass uprisings on their own do not constitute a revolution—that is, a transfer of power from one social class, or even layer, to another that leads to fundamental change. The actual size of the crowd is not a determinant. It is only when, in its majority, it develops a clear set of social and political aims that it may become one. If not, it will always be outflanked by those who do, or overwhelmed by the state that will move to recapture lost ground very rapidly.

Egypt after 2011 was the clearest example of this. No organs of autonomous power ever emerged. The Muslim Brotherhood's errors included factionalism, stupidity and over-eagerness to reassure the US, Israel and the national security apparatuses that it would be business as usual. As for a constituent assembly, little such thinking was taking place, in Egypt or elsewhere. When new mass mobilizations erupted against Morsi, even larger than those that led to the toppling of Mubarak, the Left suggested that some of those who swelled the crowd were army and police units in civilian gear. Others already saw the Army as their saviour and, in more than a few instances, applauded the military's brutality against the Muslim Brothers. The result? The *ancien régime* was soon back in charge. If

the original was not a revolution, the latter was hardly a counter-revolution. Simply the military reasserting its role in national politics. It was they who had decided first to dump Mubarak, then Morsi.

Who will dump them? Another mass mobilization? Until the West-backed Israeli assault on Gaza, this was difficult to imagine. Social movements incapable of developing an independent politics are fated to disappear. But, contrary to appearances, Gaza has revived political consciousness. The Army permitted a few large pro-Palestinian demonstrations, allowing people to vent their anger; but this also helped to concentrate attention on the weaknesses of the Army and the shame it had brought the country by its total failure to help the Gazans. Netanyahu had the Egyptian generals in his thrall. And not just them. Jordan did not ban mass demonstrations, but it did nothing for the Palestinians. The Saudis and their cousins in the Gulf were inflicted by self-paralysis. A few friendly noises. Little else. Never before have leaders of the Arab world been so united behind the Stars and Stripes while their people were being butchered.

Libya

In Libya, the old regime was destroyed by NATO after a six-month bombing spree in which up to 50,000 people died. There is convincing proof that Gaddafi was prepared to negotiate and offered numerous concessions to his own people and the West. In *Loved Egyptian Night,* Hugh Roberts has effectively demolished the 'humanitarian intervention' case that was being put forward by Obama adviser Samantha Power and some on her left.[8] The motive for the NATO intervention was regime-change; to complete the mopping-up of residual Arab nationalism. Three *jihadi* groups took

power, while armed tribal gangs of one sort or another roamed the country, demanding their share of the loot. Hardly a revolution, by any criterion.

Gaddafi had been flattered by the British and French into abandoning his nuclear pretensions and more. Blair's debased political adviser, Anthony (Lord) Giddens went to Tripoli to thank him in person, comparing the Libyan leader's awful writings to his own 'Third Way', and returned to inform *Guardian* readers that Libya would soon become the Norway of Africa. A generous tip to the London School of Economics ensured that Gaddafi's favourite son was provided with a PhD, crafted by Anne-Marie Slaughter. Sarkozy's praise was equally forthcoming, winning him Libyan financial backing for his election campaign. All appeared to be going well until the Arab Spring allowed the West to have its way. First the UN 'duty to protect' propaganda campaign against a purported genocide-in-waiting, then NATO's aerial bombardment and the lynching of Gaddafi, allegedly sodomized with a red-hot iron bar after his whereabouts were leaked by US intelligence, while Clinton, Obama's Secretary of State, crowed: 'We came. We saw. He died.' Five years later, she lost to Trump.

Syria

In the 1960s there were serious attempts to lay the foundations of a unified Arab world, with three major countries, Egypt, Syria and Iraq, run by popular radical-nationalist governments, on which the hopes of so many rested. It came to naught because of their own mistakes. Egypt bought off. Iraq re-colonized and divided. What would be Syria's fate? Here, too, the mass uprising of 2011 was largely genuine and reflected a desire for political change. Western powers were involved but could have been outflanked. Had Assad agreed to negotiations during the first six months, or even later, there might

have been a constitutional settlement. Instead, he embarked on repression. The tragically familiar Sunni–Shia battlelines were re-drawn. Once the opposition decided to take up arms, the die was cast. A civil war began and a large section of the movement was drawn into a confessional umbrella backed by the US and its allies. Turkey, Qatar and the Saudis poured in weaponry and volunteers to their side. The notion that the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) was the carrier of a Syrian revolution was as risible as the idea of the Brotherhood playing the same role in Egypt. A brutal civil war with atrocities on both sides ensued. Did the regime use gas or other chemical weapons? We do not know. The strikes envisaged by the US were primarily designed to prevent Assad's military from defeating the opposition. Until December 2024, the Iranians and Russians kept the regime in power. Most Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, including many who started the uprising, were only too aware that US strikes would not make their country better. Those at home feared both sides.

After repeated assaults on the Palestinians, the Israelis have gone into over-stretch mode and occupied parts of Syria in an informal alliance with HTS, the Turkish-supported offshoot of Al-Qaeda, and the Syrian Kurds. The Israeli-Kurdish alliance is becoming a feature in the region. So preoccupied are the Kurdish leaders with their own situation that they have thrown in their lot with the US-Israeli cartel. They appear not to have noticed the killing fields in Palestine. They will be disappointed once again. Of course, and understandably, many Syrians celebrated the departure of Assad, but so did Netanyahu and Washington. The alliance is a marriage made in Hell. And the news coming out of the 'liberated' country is not good. Revenge killings galore. Syria is no longer a sovereign state. The post-colonial period has come to an end. The US wants the Gulf model adopted by the conquered territories. It's not going to be easy.

Iran

Why is Israel so desperate to knock out Iran? Any sovereign well-armed state in the region is seen by the Zionist leaders as posing a threat to their creation. They've had a run of striking successes over the past twenty years: Iraq destroyed, Libya divided, Syria now taken over by a Turkish-Israeli combination, which has cut a deal with sections of the Baathist apparatus. But there have been some unintended consequences. The US decision to regime-change Iraq in 2003 meant handing some authority to the Shia clerical outfits there. This changed Iran's status overnight. With their co-religionists in power in Baghdad, the Islamic Republic became a major factor in the region, stronger than ever before and wielding more influence. It is also getting to the stage where it could acquire nuclear weapons relatively rapidly and the Zionist military-intelligence establishment feels threatened. While the whole world knows that Israel has 300 nuclear warheads and missiles that could reach anywhere in Europe or Central Asia, any potential rival still needs to be destroyed.

For the US, Iran's sovereignty and its oil are a dangerous combination. Washington wants to control both, so that China and Russia will have to get an American greenlight before they can trade with the Islamic Republic. For its part, the clerical leadership is divided. The turbaned ones have been tricked before. They backed the US in Iraq and Afghanistan, and got very little in return. Their anti-imperialism is that of fools. National self-interest is what really matters—and that means preventing the collapse of the clerical system. Another 2022-style revolt is to be avoided at all costs. Reports from Tehran suggest many women these days walk around with heads uncovered in the streets, just like in Beirut. The law 'on hijab and chastity', passed by the Majlis, has been suspended. But the population has been hard hit by the economic crisis caused by US

sanctions, symbolized by widespread power cuts, and the urban middle classes loathe the regime. Some would like change brought by outside intervention, but many value the relative peace and security of their state, by comparison to the devastation that Western intervention has brought to their neighbours in Afghanistan and Iraq. A Syrian-style operation would be virtually impossible here. The Revolutionary Guards are not a pushover, however shaken by their recent defeats, and there is no force inside the country that could defeat them militarily. If anything, it is they who might be provoked to replace the existing regime with hardliners. Despite the defeats in Lebanon and Syria, the Iranian military can still strike back at Israel. If Trump demands too much and the Guide caves, action by the pasdaran cannot be excluded.

Israel–Palestine

And what of Israel? Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein, two leading Jewish critics of Israel, yet, for many decades, staunch opponents of a single-state solution, have now stated publicly that Israel should no longer exist. What they mean, of course, is Israel as presently constituted: an apartheid settler state, a colonial monster that has been wreaking revenge on the Palestinian Arabs, from the 1948 Nakba on, for past sufferings inflicted by Europeans on the Jews. Despite some disagreements on whether they should adopt a more friendly attitude to Arab nationalism, the bulk of Zionist leaders decided to stick with the powers that had created them, ignoring the crucial help they got from Stalin in the shape of Czech weaponry in 1948. Hence the decision to join Britain and France in invading Egypt in 1956 and attempting to topple Nasser. They did so without US permission and Eisenhower was livid. Neither Israel nor Britain made the same mistake again.

But the problem remained. Revisionist Israeli historians like Benny Morris published revealing research exposing the Nakba, which he also continued to justify. A former IDF paratrooper himself, Morris admitted everything that Palestinian leaders and intellectuals had been saying was true. Yes, villages were forcibly emptied, houses were stolen, Arab women were raped by Israeli soldiers. Yes, there were massacres. But so what? A superior social order was taking over and large-scale ethnic cleansing was central to the Zionist project. As Morris told a *Haaretz* interviewer, 'Even the great American democracy could not have been created without the annihilation of the Indians. There are cases in which the overall, final good justifies harsh and cruel acts that are committed in the course of history.'[9] Jewish supremacist arguments of this type are common in Israel today, where at least 70 per cent of the population justifies the genocide in motion. The aim of the Zionist leaders, regardless of party differences or doctrinal divides, was always the creation of Eretz Israel. Invented history, crazed references to the Old Testament, downplaying of genetic and archaeological evidence, constant weaponization of the Judeocide—all were brought into play to make it clear that no peaceful settlement with the Palestinians was ever possible.[10]

Benny Morris has just provided a new analysis of the changes in Israeli society since October 7. He begins by asserting that Israel is not currently committing genocide in Gaza: 'The prosecutor in The Hague and all the learned professors, from Omer Bartov on down, who talk about a genocide, are wrong.' There is no deliberate intention to wipe out the Palestinians: 'Many of them have been killed, but this is no policy.' However, Morris writes, the genocide may be in the offing: 'Israel may be on the way there, already deep in the loop that leads to mass murder, shaping the public's hearts and minds.' Some may already be there, citing 'Amalek', the biblical enemy to be exterminated, with a nod to the Palestinians; speaking

about uprooting them, exiles and transfers—just like the Nazis before 1940, Morris notes. Religious Zionists openly declare their desire to flatten Nablus and Jenin:

> The dehumanization that has to take root before mass murder is already here. Once upon a time, a minister in Israel talked about 'cockroaches in a bottle' and was reprimanded. Today there are hardly any reprimands. The Jewish public appears largely indifferent to the mass killing in Gaza, including of women and children. It is apathetic toward the starving of Palestinians in the West Bank by means of banning them from working in Israel, and to the violent harassment of Palestinians there, including in the past year as many were killed at the hands of settlers.
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> The dehumanization is evident every day, apparent from the soldiers' testimonies; from the killing of civilians in Gaza; from the brutality shown by soldiers and jailers while detainees, some from Hamas and some civilians, are led half-naked to the detention camps; from the routine of beatings and torture in the detention camps and prisons themselves. The Jewish-Israeli public is indifferent to all of it. And apparently the political gatekeepers are too. They are relentlessly buffeted by acts of injustice and corruption, by manipulations from all around, therefore helpless in the face of this overflowing cruelty. These are all signs of the dehumanization that precedes and promotes genocide.[11]

Unlike the BBC, CNN and French TV networks, Morris wants to make this dehumanization known. He is not indifferent; but his Zionism remains unshaken. He ascribes equal blame to the Palestinians for their 'dehumanization of Jews'. True, their uprooting in 1948 and the oppression they had suffered since 1967 in the West Bank at the hands of the Jews, 'frequently with brutality and always with humiliation', played a part in this priming of Arab hearts and minds, Morris admits. It will only be deepened by 'the mass killing and displacement of the past 15 months.' He then 'goes back into

history', like Netanyahu and his father (also a historian), to describe all the massacres that have been inflicted upon the Jews, 'mainly by Christians but also by Muslims', over the past 2,000 years.

Morris wants another state for the Palestinians but knows it is 'unimaginable'; and if there is no second state, there will be a 'proper' genocide. He does not dwell too much on who has prevented a second state—the PLO? Hamas? Or the Zionist entity whose 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians he continues to defend? All the evidence shows that it was Ben Gurion who instigated the Nakba in 1948. It was he who ordered the IDF to kill if Palestinians resisted the expulsions, which they did. Morally there is no difference whatsoever between Ben Gurion then and Netanyahu today.[12]

Twenty years ago, the Hebrew poet Aharon Shabtai warned his people about Ben Gurion:

The dumpy little man
With the scourge in his hand,
In his free time
Runs his fingers
Over the keys of a baby grand . . .
He'll help solve the economy's problems:
The unemployed will man the tanks,
Or dig graves,
And, come evening,
We'll listen to Schubert and Mozart . . .
But now, who will I meet
When I go out for dinner?
Gramsci's jailers?
What clamour will rise
up through the window facing the street?
And when it's all over,
My dear, dear reader,
On which benches will we have to sit,
Those of us who shouted 'Death to the Arabs'
And those who claimed they 'didn't know.'

The tragedies have multiplied since you wrote these words, dear Aharon. For many years I believed there were two options. Two states of the same size or a single state with equal rights for all. Had Zionism been so inclined either would have been possible, if neither totally satisfactory. But Ben Gurion, Morris, Begin, Sharon, Netanyahu prevailed in the end. The PLO continued to think that the US would force through a deal and finally surrendered at Oslo. Israel now behaves like a junior partner of the Great Satan. Leaders need to be killed? Countries need to be bombed, divided and bombed again? Just do it. In return, Israel gets to devour more Palestinians. And if

the million and a half don't want to become refugees, will the Zionists be allowed to exterminate them wholesale? It's their fault, after all, for being Palestinian in the first place.

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[1] See the portrait by Sabry Hafez, 'An Arabian Master', NLR 37, Jan–Feb 2006.

[2] The US did the same in Japan after the War. American interests, it was argued, entailed keeping Hirohito on the throne, despite the fact that he had authorized the attack on Pearl Harbor.

[3] Office of the Historian, 'Memorandum of Conversation Between the King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz Al Saud) and President Roosevelt, 14 February 1945, Aboard the USS Quincy', Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945.

[4] Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, Stanford 2006.

[5] Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, p. 234.

[6] There is a matchless account of the Egyptian Army after Nasser's triumph and the petty rivalries and stupidities at the top that led to serious political setbacks in the region: Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt*, London and New York 2012.

[7] Tariq Ali, 'This Is an Arab 1848, But US Hegemony Has Only Been Dented', *Guardian*, 22 February 2011.

[8] Hugh Roberts, *Loved Egyptian Night: The Meaning of the Arab Spring*, London and New York 2024. The first chapter gives a sober and unanswerable account of what happened in Libya. Pages 109–13 provide a withering critique of SOAS's Gilbert Achcar, whose arguments were 'exactly the position of the Western powers'. The book's title is a scathing reference to Kipling's appeal to the McKinley White House, in well-polished tragic-imperial mode: 'Take up the White Man's burden / And reap his old reward: / The blame of those ye better / The hate of those ye guard / The

cry of hosts ye humour / (Ah, slowly!) towards the light: / "Why brought ye us from bondage, / Our loved Egyptian night?"' (1899).

[9] See the candid interview, apparently intended for an Israeli-only audience, reprinted by NLR: Benny Morris, 'On Ethnic Cleansing', NLR 26, March–April 2004.

[10] See Rashid Khalidi, 'The Neck and the Sword', NLR 147, May–June 2024.

[11] Benny Morris, 'It's Either Two States or Genocide', *Haaretz*, 30 January 2025.

[12] For a remarkable study of the IDF, see Haim Bresheeth-Zabner, *An Army Like No Other: How the Israel Defence Forces Made a Nation*, London and New York 2020.